

Stroud District Councillor's Report

October 2020

Coronavirus Response

Outbreak Management Plan

Local Authorities with Public Health responsibilities (in Gloucestershire, the County Council) were asked by Government to prepare **Local Outbreak Management Plans** (LOMP) by 30 June 2020 to support the national NHS Test and Trace programme in the identification and management of Covid-19 outbreaks. They were given Government funding to develop and deliver tailored plans working with the district councils, local NHS, PHE and other stakeholders to identify and contain potential outbreaks in settings such as workplaces, care homes, hospitals and schools. These plans will need to be in place for the foreseeable future. The LOMP provides the framework for the county's local multi-agency response to Covid-19, and aims to anticipate, prevent and contain incidents and outbreaks in the local area, as well as taking the opportunity to work with local people to prevent outbreaks place.

SDC working arrangements

Following the new national restrictions (22 September), the SDC Ebley Mill Reception will not open to the public in early October as planned. Most SDC staff will return to working from home unless they cannot do their jobs at home. Customer Services staff continue to work from Ebley Mill as experience has shown that the council can provide a better service in this area from COVID-secure offices

Update on SDC Environmental Health work

A brief overview of the work since March, of the District Council's Environmental Health team which have a crucial role in Covid-prevention, compliance and enforcement:

- **Local businesses** - 563 contacts have been made with local businesses specifically in respect of Covid-19 matters. These figures will include contacts with some businesses more than once. They include a range of interventions such as responses to complaints about non-compliance, requests for guidance from businesses, on-site interventions to check and monitor compliance and monitoring the health status of the crew of ships arriving at Sharpness Docks.
- **Public Health meetings** Environmental health managers are involved in weekly meetings with Public Health and other agencies in Gloucestershire at a strategic and operational level. This includes regular discussion of clusters and outbreaks and the development and regular modification of a Covid Prevention Plan.
- **Enforcing regulations** Since the start of the lockdown EH officers have been actively enforcing the Coronavirus Restriction Regulations as they apply to businesses and were also responsible for ensuring that the phased re-opening of businesses, as restrictions were eased, was carried out in accordance with government's Covid-Secure guidelines. Officers in the Commercial Services Unit are authorised under the Health and Safety at Work Act and, together with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors, can enforce Covid-secure measures if necessary. District Councils are not involved in enforcement of the requirements in educational establishments or primary care.
- **Business Advice** The team have also sent out email and paper mail shots to some specific business sectors (such as hairdressers and licensed premises) and contacted 130 taxi drivers with advice (which included the adoption of a local policy on the use of screens in taxis).

- **A new Covid Compliance Officer** – David Peacock - has now been appointed to monitor compliance and provide additional support for local businesses. The post has been fully funded by Public Health Gloucestershire as part of a £300K support package to assist District Councils in managing Covid security.
- **HSE** will continue to be responsible for Covid-secure enforcement in settings such as food factories and agricultural holdings but it is anticipated that Covid Compliance officers will be enabled to provide advice and guidance to all businesses.
- **Current priorities** for SDC officers are the hospitality industry, close contact services (such as hairdressers and nail bars), nurseries and events.
- **The Licensing Team** have been in regular contact with licensed premises to keep them up to date with developments and have provided advice and guidance to local taxi drivers.

Support for those who need to self-isolate

Those on lower incomes who cannot work from home and have lost income as a result will be supported by a payment of £500 which will be administered by district authorities. National guidance is awaited.

‘Be a Councillor’ event

SDC is planning to hold an event towards the end of October, for prospective Parish/Town and District Councillors. The event will help to promote life as a Councillor and will provide information to anyone interested in being elected as a Councillor in May 2021. Please contact Jim Dewey for more information when it is available.

Environment Committee – 3 September

Control of Dogs - Extension of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO)

Following formal consultation, the Committee agreed to endorse the proposal to further extend for another 3 years, the four existing Public Spaces Protection Orders relating to dog control. These are:

PSP01 Failing to remove the faeces when a dog under the person’s control has defecated on any land within the District which is open to the air and to which the public has a right of access.

PSP02 Not putting a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer of the Council if such restraint is necessary to prevent a nuisance, behaviour likely to cause annoyance or disturbance to a person or the worrying or disturbance of any animal or bird. This also applies to all land within the District which is open to the air and to which the public has a right of access.

PSP03 Permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded which applies, where signed at the entrance, to any fenced, hedged or walled children’s play area, bowling green, croquet lawn, tennis court, skateboard park, cycle enclosure, putting green or other sporting or recreational facility.

PSP04 Not keeping a dog on a lead in a designated area. This applies to all allotments, cemeteries, car parks, canal towpaths and designated cycle tracks as well as specified footpaths routinely used to access any primary, secondary or high school or college.

The consultation showed that there was overwhelming support for retaining the first three orders. In relation to the fourth order, Consultees were asked whether it should be amended to remove canal towpaths and cycle tracks from the specified areas where dogs should be kept on leads. Consultee

responses overall were not in favour of making this change – and responses from members of the public were strongly opposed to a change to this order.

Planning White Paper – Proposed changes to planning system

A report to the committee from the Planning Review Panel meeting set out the key changes proposed in the White Paper 'Planning for the Future' as follows:

1. Local plans would be simplified and focus on identifying three categories of land – "growth areas" that are "suitable for substantial development"; "renewal areas" that are "suitable for development"; and "protected areas". In "growth areas", outline approval would be automatically granted for forms and types of development specified in the plan. Development in renewal areas would "cover existing built areas where smaller scale development is appropriate" and could include the "gentle densification" of residential areas, development in town centres, and small sites in and around villages. There would be a "statutory presumption in favour of development" specified in the plan. Protected areas, including green belt, conservation areas and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), would still be subject to "more stringent" development.
2. Local plans should be subject to a single and "simplified" statutory "sustainable development" test, replacing the existing "tests of soundness". This new test "would consider whether the plan contributes to achieving sustainable development in accordance with policy issued by the secretary of state", the consultation states. The test could also "become less prescriptive about the need to demonstrate deliverability" and full planning applications would be required for new schemes
3. A new 'single infrastructure levy' will replace the existing developer contributions system of section 106 agreements and the community infrastructure levy. The government says the new levy will be a nationally-set, flat rate charge and would be based on the final value (or likely sales value) of a development. It says it intends the new levy to raise more revenue than under the current system of developer contributions, and deliver "at least as much" affordable housing, and on-site affordable housing, as at present
4. Penalties for councils that fail to determine an application within the statutory time limits could involve "the automatic refund of the planning fee for the application". Ministers also "want to explore whether some types of applications should be deemed to have been granted planning permission if there has not been a timely determination".
5. Where applications are refused and the decision is overturned at appeal, the paper proposes that "applicants will be entitled to an automatic rebate of their planning application fee".
6. Each local planning authority would be required to have a chief officer for design and place-making.
7. The suggested changes to local plans, developer contributions and development management "would require primary legislation followed by secondary legislation". Ministers "would expect new local plans to be in place by the end of the Parliament".

The consultation closes in mid October. The District Council will be submitting a response.

Local Plan Review

Covid-19 has resulted in some delays to producing the final, updated Local Plan, although good progress has been made in terms of evidence gathering. Submission of the Plan will be delayed, until March 2021 or May 2021. This will mean that an extra 60 houses will be added to the Local Plan Requirement – as it will be more than 5 years since the current local plan was approved.

Covid-19 has also raised some queries as to how dwellings should be built in future particularly as working from home (as opposed to going out to work) requires work space at home.

Future topics for discussion can be seen on the Environment Committee [Work Programme](#).

Housing Committee - 22 September

Strategy and Plan for new Council Homes

The Committee approved the Strategy and Action Plan for the next phase of council house building in the District. Within the Council's financial plan, a budget of £22.8 million has already been approved for a further 111 new homes to be delivered over the next 4 years together with a land acquisition fund of £3 million

In accordance with approved procedures, where there an existing budget has been agreed, any land/property purchases above £500,000 will be presented to Strategy and Resources Committee for approval (unless there is insufficient time in which case the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee will be consulted).

Affordable housing is a key priority for the Council – as referenced in the Corporate Delivery Plan and the recent new Strategy 'Recover, reset and Renew: A Strategy for Stroud District Council 2020-21' which sets out the Council's approach post Covid 19 and longer term renewal.

In the last five years, the SDC New Homes and Regeneration Programme has seen 239 new homes added to the Council's stock of over 5,000 properties in the District.

The new strategy and action plan detail the vision and objectives for the delivery of new homes over the next four years and set out the priorities for the purchase of more land, the methodology for setting the type, tenure, location and standards of accommodation.

New homes will be constructed in line with the Council's 2030 Carbon Neutral commitment and will take a 'fabric first' approach to achieve minimum SAP 86 ratings. SAP rating scores are out of 100; homes in Stroud District have an average SAP rating of 50+, and current Council homes have an average SAP rating of 65. To note – work is continuing to improve the SAP rating of all council homes, to make them more energy efficient for tenants. Each new scheme will be assessed to establish the best value approach to delivering greater energy efficiency.

Tenant Services Fraud Policy.

The Committee adopted the new policy, which has been fully reviewed and revised in consultation Tenant Ambassadors, Tenant Reps on Housing Committee and community groups who were supportive of the approach. The previous Policy was lacking detail to deliver the actions required to manage this area of the service.

A **Performance report** – was presented to the Committee which set out progress against Housing actions in the Corporate Delivery Programme and the Capital Programme.

SDC Full Council - 7 September

Local Government reorganisation proposals

Although Government Ministers had announced that a recovery and devolution white paper would be published in the autumn, it seems that publication has now been postponed until the new year/ spring 2021. As a result, at this Extraordinary Meeting of the Council it was agreed to defer the Report on Local Government Reorganisation for consideration until the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper has been published. The Council Leader said that information from Central Government indicates that they are having a rethink and there is likely to be change of emphasis in the proposals – away from compulsion on local government reorganisation, and instead for it to be taken forward only in those areas that are in favour of it happening.

As a result, SDC will not be spending £25,000 to develop a joint proposal promoting a two unitary authority solution for Gloucestershire, as the paper had proposed.

Committee chairs

New members were appointed to positions on the Community Services & Licencing Committee, Housing Committee and Strategy & Resources Committee, following the resignation of Cllr Chas Townley from chairing Housing Committee.

Strategy & Resources Committee – No meeting in September

Canal bid - We eagerly await the deliberations of the Heritage Lottery Fund for £8.7m to complete the Stroudwater Canal. The announcement of whether we have been successful will be known this month.

Next meeting will be held on 8th October 2020. The lengthy Agenda can be viewed [here](#) with items on asset management, asset sales, Brimscombe Port and Covid-19.

Stroud Leisure centre - An Extraordinary Meeting of the Committee will be held 20th October 2020, to discuss the latest proposal from Sports Leisure Management (SLM), who run our facilities at Stratford Park, to financially support them until March 2021. Following tense discussions at Committee, the previous offer from SDC (to loan SLM £175k with terms to be agreed) was quickly rejected by SLM on commercial grounds. The next proposal is thought to be a reduced ask, but for an outright grant rather than a loan.